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Social participation of people with disabilities in organized community sport: A systematic review

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Abstract:	<p>Sport is considered to have a high potential with respect to social participation of people with disabilities, in particular in integrative and inclusive settings. However, people with disabilities continue to face social exclusion in sport, as they are underrepresented in organized mainstream sport activities and disability sport often remains separate. Thus, organized community sport can both support and foster but also restrict or even impede social participation of people with disabilities resulting in that the organized sport's contribution to social participation is also critically questioned. This article provides a systematic review of current research on social participation of people with disabilities in organized community sport in separated, integrative and inclusive settings. The review of 25 relevant studies revealed four topics based on Koster's et al. (2009) applied theoretical framework that are associated with social participation in organized community sport: (1) social contacts, interactions and friendships, (2) self-perception and identity formation and (3) social acceptance, support and embeddedness. The results draw a rather ambivalent picture of social participation of people with disabilities in organized community sport. Although most of the studies showed positive social benefits to people with disabilities in all settings with respect to the three topics that underscore the potential of organized sport. However, there are also studies reporting negative aspects people with disabilities experienced, in particular when participating in integrative and inclusive settings. This article concludes by pointing to capacity building of disability and mainstream community sport organizations in order to strengthen the positive effects while minimizing and mitigating the negative effects to ensure effective social participation of people with disabilities.</p>
Suggested Reviewers:	

**Social participation of people with disabilities
in organized community sport:
A systematic review**

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1. Introduction

With the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UN CRPD) in 2006, the participation of people with disabilities¹ in sport became an increasingly important issue in sport organizations and sport science (Kiuppis, 2018). The UN CRPD aims to enable people with disabilities to fully participate on an equal basis in sport activities at all levels. Because physical activity do not only positively affects bio-psychological development but can also provide social benefits to people with disabilities, (e.g., Di Palma, Raiola & Tafuri, 2016; Johnson, 2009). In particular, organized sport activities are considered to have a high potential for stimulating social participation, especially if they are integrative or inclusive, i.e. when people with and without disabilities practicing sport together (Elling, de Knop & Knoppers, 2001; Waring & Mason, 2010). Social participation aims at a meaningful participation (Willis et al., 2017) that refers to the qualitative nature of social aspects of participation, and therefore refers to something much more than the pure attendance of a sport activity or the pure membership. In this regard, organized sport can better affect social network building and seem to lead to greater participation of people with disabilities in other non-sportive social contexts (Kissow, 2015), and they are therefore a key to building inclusive communities (Rimmer, 2008; Spaaj, Magee & Jeanes, 2014).

On the other hand, however, research indicates that people with disabilities experience social exclusion, as they are underrepresented in all forms of cultural life (Verdonschot, de Witte, Reichrath, Buntinx & Curfs, 2009), including sport participation (Collins & Kay, 2014; Kingsley & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2015; Misener & Darcy, 2014). People with disabilities show lower participation rates in organized sport compared to the non-disabled population (e.g., Finch, 2001; Si et al., 2017; Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2014;

¹ This article uses USA and UK terminology (Kiuppis, 2018), i.e. *people with disabilities* or *disabled people* and *people without disabilities* or *non-disabled people*, respectively, as it refers to established terms in research and it reflects the social model that is important to social participation issue (Peers, Spencer-Cavaliere & Eales, 2014).

Ullenhag et al., 2012). Moreover, integrative and inclusive sport groups are quite limited or even unrealized (Kitchin & Howe, 2014), thus organized disability sport often remains separated and therefore face discrimination and exclusion from non-disabled mainstream sport (Jeanes et al., 2017; Patel, 2015). There are various barriers affecting mainstream participation (e.g., Jaarsma, Dijkstra, Geertzen & Dekker, 2014; McBeth, 2009; Shields, Synnot & Barr, 2012), including factors at an individual level (e.g. motivation, skills), structural level (e.g. personnel, infrastructural, and financial resources), and environmental level (e.g., policy programs, societal attitudes). Moreover, the specifics of sport are to taken into account, thus the predominance of physical performance and respective standards, and the largely speechless communication can make restrictions and exclusions for people with disabilities more visible than other non-sportive contexts do (Reuker et al., 2016; Spaaj et al., 2014).

Consequently, it becomes apparent that organized sport can both support and foster but also restrict or even impede social participation processes. That results in that the contribution of organized sport to social participation is also critically questioned (Coalter, 2007). Therefore, comprehensive knowledge is needed to get the whole picture of social participation. To bridge this gap, this article provides a systematic review of existing studies on social participation of people with disabilities in organized community sport. For this purpose, a review of the most important international sport scientific databases and a thematic systematization of available studies will be carried out according to a Koster's et al. (2009 theoretical framework.

2. Opportunities of participation for people with disabilities in organized

community sport

For people with disabilities, organized community sport plays a crucial role as in group activities; hence the social aspect of sport participation is much more apparent rather than in informal sport activities (Kanamori et al., 2012). At a local community level, different public and private sport organizations (e.g., schools, sports clubs, sport camps, commercial sport providers) are responsible for the delivery and organization of sport opportunities for people with disabilities and help to foster and facilitate their sport participation. To date, research on social participation of people with disabilities in organized sport mainly concentrated on school-based physical education (Reuker et al., 2016; Qi & Ha, 2012). In contrast, this issue was hardly a subject of research in the context of voluntary community sport organizations (Cunningham, 2011; Shapiro & Pitts, 2014).

The organized community sport provides a range of activities for people with disabilities. In this regard, Misener & Darcy (2014) proposed that participation in organized disability sport “is about choice across a continuum” (p. 3) that includes different settings of participation (see basically Black & Williamson, 2011; Black & Stevenson, 2012; see also Barrett, 2014; Elling et al., 2011):

- (i) *Separation (separate, alternate or discrete activities)*. People with disabilities participate in sport activities with their disabled peers, thus remain among each other (disability sport groups).
- (ii) *Integration*. People with disabilities participate in the same activity in a mixed context of ability, however, with specific rules and modifications (*modified activities*), with access it in their own way and with similar abilities (*parallel activities*) or where non-disabled participate in activities designed specifically for the disabled with common adaptations (*adapted activities; reverse integration*).

73 *iii) Inclusion (open or fully integrated activities).* People with and without disabilities

74 practice sport together where everyone does the same activity with minimal or no
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75 adaptations to the environment or equipment.
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76 Traditionally, the delivery and organization of community sport activities was part to
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77 separated disability sport groups (Fay & Wolff, 2009), and separated settings were the
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11 most commonly practiced (Goodwin & Peers, 2012). With the UN CRPD there is a great
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13 promotion of developing integration and inclusion of people with disabilities in
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15 mainstream sport (Kitchin & Howe, 2014). However, it appears that each setting seems
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17 to contribute in a different way to social participation. Separated settings help to foster
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19 social participation within the disability community (Atherthon, 2007) and support to
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21 develop a sense of belonging and relationships with other disabled peers (Shapiro &
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23 Martin, 2010; Wynnyik & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2013). Whereas integrative and inclusive
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25 settings can support the participation of people with disabilities in mainstream sport and
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27 community (Di Palma et al., 2016; Kissow, 2015).
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36 **3. Theoretical framing of social participation of people with disabilities in** 37 38 **organized sport** 39 40

41 When it comes to social aspects of people with disabilities' engagement in sport,
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43 there are different theoretical approaches taken into account such as social participation
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45 and related concepts of social integration, social inclusion and social exclusion. All
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47 concepts contribute to explain the engagement of people with disabilities in sport, but
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49 each from a distinctive perspective. Although there are attempts to demarcating these
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51 concepts from each other (e.g., Booth, 2004), in previous research these concepts are
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53 not sufficiently defined and delineated or even used synonymously (Haudenhuyse, 2017;
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55 Reuker et al., 2016; Simplican et al., 2015) resulting in confusion and conflicts about the
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terminology. With this regard, Koster, Nakken, Pijl & van Houten (2009) point to that “the concept of social integration and its related concepts, social inclusion and social participation, hardly seem to differ in practice with respect to content, if at all” (p. 131). Therefore, this review follows the approach of Koster et al. (2009), who propose a synthesis of these concepts by using the term “social participation” (see also Bossaert, Colpin, Pijl & Petry, 2013). According to Koster et al. the framework consists of four key aspects, including both positive and negative attributes that are critical to social participation:

- (i) *social relationships and friendships* (e.g., friendship network, mutual friendship),
- (ii) *social contacts and interactions* (e.g., playing and working together; social isolation),
- (iii) *social self-perception* (e.g., physical and social self-concept, loneliness),
- (iv) *social acceptance* by significant others (e.g., social preference, support, rejection).

Based on this, Koster et al. derive the following definition of social participation:

„Social participation [...] is the presence of positive social contact/interaction between these children [with disabilities] and their classmates; acceptance of them by their classmates; social relationships/friendships between them and their classmates and the pupils’ perception they are accepted by their classmates.” (2009, p. 135).

Koster et al. developed this framework for physical education context; however, it is also applicable to sport in general, including organized community sport, as respective reviews identified similar aspects of social participation (e.g., Di Palma et al., 2016; Kissow, 2015, Willis et al., 2017). With this framework a comprehensive understanding of social participation is given, in contrast to other concepts that are limited to vague definitions and barely offer a differentiation of relevant dimensions. Thus, with this framework systematic empirical studies can be carried out and the respective findings

123 can be classified then, and finally a comparison to social participation in school-based
124 physical education is potential.

125 Existing studies on these four aspects confirm the ambivalent nature of sport
126 contributing to social participation of people with disabilities. Regarding the positive side,
127 Tasiemski and Brewer (2011) showed that regularly sport participation of people with
128 spinal cord injury was positively related to athletic identity, the sport-specific part of self-
129 concept that means those people defines themselves through sport participation and self-
130 image is related with an athlete role. The level of athletic identity is even higher for team
131 sport rather than individual sport. In accordance, Taub and Greer (2000) showed that
132 physical activity legitimizes the social identity and perception of children with disabilities
133 (e.g. competence, self-enhancement), and moreover strengthens their social ties (e.g.,
134 opportunity for social interaction and bonding), and is perceived as a normalizing
135 experience (e.g. increases quality of life). Also, Fenton et al. (2017) reported in their
136 review that community-based recreation activity had positive social impact on people with
137 mental disabilities positively with expanded social networks, a sense of belonging, and
138 improved social skills. Similarly, Kissow (2015) concluded in her review that physical
139 activity of people with physical disabilities seems to have a positive impact on learning
140 social rules, their social identity as being part of a community, their empowerment and
141 independence, and therefore might lead to extended participation in other non-sportive
142 contexts of everyday social life (e.g., family, education, public space, non-sport leisure
143 activities). However, the positive social participation's outcome to people with disabilities
144 appear to be relative compared to the non-disabled, i.e. people with disabilities do not
145 experience social participation to the same extend as non-disabled do and then the
146 negative side of participation comes to the fore. Koster and colleagues showed that
147 children with disabilities have fewer friendships and contacts, have a lower self-
148 conception and are less accepted than non-disabled children (Koster et al., 2009; Koster

et al., 2010). Moreover, there are further differences regarding the form of disability. Lippold and Burns (2009) showed that adolescents with intellectual disabilities have weaker social networks, less social support, and experience greater social isolation than adolescents with physical disabilities. Schwab (2016) demonstrated that the social acceptance and attitudes of non-disabled children to children with intellectual disabilities are more negative than to children with physical disabilities. Consequently, only in comparison with significant others (i.e. disabled or non-disabled peers) it can be assessed whether the social participation is to be consider positive or negative.

Although current research addressed social participation and related concepts, there still remain some considerable research deficits. To date, research on social participation in organized community sport is limited. Moreover, only single aspects were analyzed, i.e. studies focused on aspects as social contacts or social identity. However, studies analyzing social participation in the greater context, i.e. comprising different aspects of social participation and their interaction as Koster et al. (2009) proposed, are missing. Therefore, a systematic review is indicated aims to provide a synopsis of existing studies on the dimensions or partial aspects of social participation. For this review, the approach of Koster et al. is considered as an fruitful analytical framework for selecting and structuring the literature with a focus on four subtopics of social participation: social relationships, interactions, perception, and acceptance. The reviews objective is to show in more detail in which setting (separate, integrative or inclusive) and what form of disability (e.g., physical or intellectual) whether the positive or negative aspects of social participation in organized community sport are predominate. This knowledge is important to identify the chances, challenges and limitations of organized community sport for people with disabilities.

174 **4. Method**

175 *Search strategy*

176 To identify studies addressing the topic of social participation of people with disabilities in
177 organized sport, an electronic literature search was conducted in relevant databases. For
178 the characteristics of the search strategy, the keywords of the categories included similar
179 or related terms that previous research applied, to enable a broach search (see Table 1).
180 Specific attention was paid to the four aspects of social participation according to the
181 outlined framework.

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185 *Insert Table 1 round here*
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189 *Inclusion and exclusion criteria*

190 Searches were limited to scientific peer-reviewed journal articles in English language
191 published in the last two decades, dating from January 1997 to December 2017. Then,
192 the titles, abstracts and full texts were screened with the same catalogue of criteria. The
193 inclusion criteria were that the articles had to focus on any of the four aspect of social
194 participation (e.g. relation-/friendship, contact/interaction, self-perception, acceptance) of
195 people with any kind of disability (e.g., physical, intellectual, multiple or sensory
196 disabilities) in voluntary organized sport at local level (e.g., sport clubs, community sport
197 activity or sport camp). That comprises rehabilitative, recreational sport and even
198 competitive sport (e.g. local or regional baseball league) in any kind of setting (separated,
199 integrative or inclusive). School-based physical education as well as (paralympic) elite

200 sport at (inter)national level was excluded due to their different objectives and structures
201 compared to voluntary organized community sport. Moreover, only studies providing
202 empirical evidence of social participation were included with both quantitative and
203 qualitative designs. In contrast, all other contributions (e.g., book chapters and
204 handbooks, literature reviews or meta-analyses, and congress abstracts) were excluded.

205 *Data extraction and analysis*

206 From the 852 records initially identified, 25 articles were finally selected and included in
207 the review, after excluding duplicates, screening titles and abstracts, and reviewing the
208 full texts for eligibility (see Figure 1). A thematical analysis was conducted to identify and
209 analyze respective patterns with respect to social participation in the selected articles
210 (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2015). The thematical analysis was mainly a deductive
211 approach by two of the authors working independently using a catalogue of criteria
212 according to the above mentioned criteria with specific attention to the four aspects of
213 social participation. However, room was left for inductive analysis by including further
214 topics related to social participation emerging out of the selected articles.

215 The interrater-reliability according to Holsti-Index was 92.8% for the title screening,
216 72.5% for the abstract screening and 96.7% for the full text review that all can be
217 classified as very good. Differences concerning the decisions of selection were discussed
218 between both reviewers at all steps to achieve congruency. From the included articles,
219 the names of the authors, the publication year, a brief description of the article, including
220 the methods and the sample characteristics, the basic theoretical framework used in the
221 study (if applicable), and the main findings were extracted then.

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Insert Figure 1 round here

Characteristics of included studies

The 25 articles included in the review were published between 2001 and 2017 (see Table 2). All articles refer to empirical studies that were mainly conducted in Anglo-American countries. Half of the studies are theory-driven, using different theoretical approaches (e.g., Contact theory, Athletic Identity, Social Support, Self-concept). One part of the studies following a qualitative method approach mainly applied semi-structured interviews as instruments. Other studies were cross-sectional studies, based on a quantitative method approach with standardized questionnaires. In both the quantitative and qualitative studies, social inclusion was measured by self-assessment of the involved participants with disabilities and/or assessment by others. With regard to the sample, the studies included participants with different forms of physical disabilities, visual and hearing impairment, intellectual and mental disabilities. The studies analyzed different organizational settings, including largely separated or inclusive setting. It is to be that an assignment of the settings (integrative vs. inclusive) as outlined in chapter 2 was not possible due to lack of information given in the studies.

Insert Table 2 round here

249 **4. Results**

250 Koster et al. (2009) provided a valuable framework that lays out a systematic strategy for
251 searching literature and for structuring the results. The identified topics refer either to one
252 dimension or the respective sub items of this framework. But also crossover topics were
253 addressed. Therefore, Koster et al.'s original dimensions were slightly modified. In the
254 included studies the dimensions "contacts/interactions" and "relationships/ friendships"
255 were not demarcated from one another, but mostly treated as one topic and therefore
256 merged. With respect to the dimension "self-perception", the respective studies mainly
257 dealt with issues of social identity and therefore this topic was added to the dimension.
258 For the dimension "social acceptance", a large part of the studies focused on the sub-
259 item social support and in further studies social embeddedness with respect to different
260 aspects of community integration were treated as a separate issue; thus these two topics
261 were included to the dimension. Consequently, the analysis of the 25 included articles
262 reveals three subtopics with respect to social participation of people with disabilities in
263 organized sport on that previous research focused on: (1) social contacts, interactions
264 and relationships (2) self-perception and identity formation, and (3) social acceptance,
265 support and embeddedness.

266
267 *Contacts, interactions and friendships*

268 For separated organizational setting, Darcy and Dowse (2013) reported that people with
269 disabilities with low to moderate support needs show higher levels of participation and
270 receive stronger social benefits (e.g., belonging, companionship and achievement) when
271 participating in sport activities compared to people with high support needs. Those
272 people experienced a "sense of belonging associated with building confidence with
273 others, enjoyment with friends and being part of the community like everyone else" and
274 moreover reported "increasing levels of independence and building and enhancing family

relationships” (p. 403). Similarly, Lyons et al. (2009) demonstrated that the participation of children with mental disabilities in separated communal baseball leagues enhances their social interactions (e.g. gaining new friendship with disabled and abled peers) and that it has a positive impact on the entire family unit (e.g. sharing the same activity, relationship enhancement with their siblings). Also, Goodwin et al. (2011) reported that youths with visual impairments participating in a separated camp sensed feelings of belonging to a community through positive interactions and reciprocal relationships with their disabled peers: “Friendships were made and rekindled, younger athletes were mentored by other athletes, and emotional connections were formed as experiences of living as a person with a visual impairment were shared” (p. 50). But the youths contrasted that to the social isolation and physical activity void they experienced at home. Given this, Caword et al. (2015) illustrated that involvement of people with intellectual disabilities in separated Unified Sport Program is positively associated with their self-esteem and quality of life, but not with their engagement in social networks. However, the program’s participants showed higher scores on relationships than disabled participants in non-organized sport settings. Atherton (2007) argued that joining separated deaf sports clubs provides social contact with other deaf people and promotes the social cohesion of the deaf community. However, greater social benefits were gained from playing in the company of their non-disabled peers than with other deaf people. For inclusive organizational settings, Carter et al. (2014) carried out that children with physical disabilities gained confidence to be part of a group and making new friendships by inclusive wheelchair sport. Moreover, the benefits seem mutual, as “the children enjoyed playing together in wheelchairs and both children with and without disabilities and gained insight into each other’s world” (p. 938). Also, Kristen et al. (2002) pointed to that participating in a separated disability sport club or inclusive club promote the gaining of new friends and the ability to pursuit sports together for children with physical

disabilities. In accordance, Corraza and Dyer (2017) analyzed local inclusive rugby clubs and demonstrated a positive impact on social networks as both disabled and non-disabled participants reported to develop new relationships and friendships within and outside the club activity. This “bonding relationships were evident through teammates forging close friendships both on and off the rugby pitch” (p. 134). In the same direction, Hassan et al. (2012) concluded that inclusive Special Olympics Unified Sport Programs for people with intellectual disabilities promote the building of social relationships between the disabled and non-disabled athletes based on mutual trust and shared values, which leads to strong social ties developing between the team members. Moreover, participants also reported a greater degree of interaction between athletes outside the playing field through non-sport activities, i.e. fostering networks within the disability community. Similarly, Mc Conkey et al. (2013) showed the positive impact such participation has on the creation of inclusive and equal bonds (e.g. focus on teamwork, gaining and maintaining friendships) between intellectual disabled and non-disabled participants. Mc Conkey et al. concluded that “Unified Sports offered the opportunity for inclusive and equal bonds to be forged among the two sets of participants that extended into friendships beyond the playing field. [However,] When these bonds were absent, there was less evidence of mutual participation in community settings” (p. 8). More specific, Devine and O’Brien (2007) showed that adolescent participants with intellectual disabilities of an inclusive sport camp both experienced positive and negative aspects of social contact with respect to its nature, quality, and conditions. Making new friends was perceived as positive because the contact was experienced as personal and mutually rewarding if the contact was based on equal status and common interests. Also, the variations of contacts between the participants themselves and with the camp supervisors were perceived positively. However, the social contacts were regarded as weird and frustrating when they were superficial, lacking reciprocity or based on unequal

status or contrived friendships. Moreover, Medland and Ellis-Hill (2008) highlighted that the participation of non-disabled athletes in disability wheelchair sport (i.e. reverse integration) promotes the building of inclusive friendships through the sharing of an activity with their disabled friends and family. Whereas reverse integration was completely favored by the abled-bodies, in contrast, some of the disabled participants expressed their disapproval and concern about that they would no longer considered as athlete but as disabled, when “someone who is an intruder or faking it” (i.e. able-bodied) participating (p. 113). And Hiu-Lun Tsai and Fung (2009) reported consistent negative aspects as they revealed that parents experienced rejection by staff and other participants when searching inclusive sport programs for their intellectual disabled children. If their children were participating, they reported a lack of quality contact and a lack of understanding between people with and without disabilities.

To summarize, the result show that participation in organized community sport largely contributes to enhance the social contacts, interactions and friendships in both separate and inclusive setting and to different forms of disabilities (e.g. physical, visual, intellectual). However, it seems that the contacts, interactions and friendships are received more frequently and deeper with disabled peers and in the separated setting than with non-disabled peers and in the inclusive setting.

Self-perception and identity formation

For separated organizational setting, Piatt et al. (2017) showed that the amount of time in participation in community sports clubs contributes to build an athletic identity of adolescents with mobile impairments, regardless of demographic factors (e.g. age, gender). More specifically, Goodwin and Staples (2008) reported that youths with disabilities participating in a separated sport summer camp positively influenced their identity developments as the youths experienced new understandings of their physical

potential and gained the “opportunity to express their independence and learn to be self-reliant” (p. 173-174). Similarly, Weiss et al. (2003) reported that involvement of people with developmental disabilities in separated Special Olympic Sport programs promotes positive self-concept with their perceived general self-worth and physical competence is positive related to the level of physical activity and number of sports they participate as well as with the spend time affiliated with the sports organization. Interestingly, the parents consistently underestimated their children’s self-concept with no difference between father and mother that, in turn, means that the children rated their self-concept higher than their parents. Anderson et al. (2008) reported that children and adolescents with physical disabilities engaged in separated wheelchair sport regarded their sport as a normalizing experience with respect to their feeling of being similar to others, i.e. they viewed themselves as normal in their social environment. However, “that participants did not think of themselves as necessarily like other girls without disabilities, but defined themselves more by their disabilities. Therefore, their interactions reflected camaraderie amongst those who have a disability rather than with able-bodied girls” (p. 196).

For integrative and inclusive setting, Kristen et al. (2002, 2003) revealed that the participation of children with physical disabilities in both disability or regular sport clubs was regarded by the children’s’ parents as important to being part of a social group (i.e. experiencing a feeling of togetherness, having a good time, making new friends) and contributes to becoming someone (i.e. increased self-confidence; acceptance in group).

Also, Anderson (2009) showed that local wheelchair sport contributes to the participants’ identity formation, through the social interaction that it provides, for instance, referring to opportunities for exploring interests, environmental feedback to reinforce personal interests, level of comfort with social world in the form of belonging, normality, and uniqueness. Anderson concluded that “participation in sport had the advantage [...], albeit an adapted activity, [...] to develop an athletic identity [...]. Although they

recognized that they cannot be as competitive in an inclusive environment” (p. 444). Spencer-Cavaliere and Peers (2011) reported that people with disabilities, engaged in reverse integration settings, competing with non-disabled players contribute to their self-perception with an enhancement of their athletic identities and abilities. The disabled “expressed strong affiliation with the role of athlete as exemplified through high levels of training, competition and sport commitment” (p. 304) and therefore considering wheelchair basketball as critical to their daily live. However, a few disabled athletes reported a negative influence as they considered fewer opportunities to gain sport skills. Similar results Ninot et al. (2000) carried out by observing that female adolescents with mental retardation participating in separated training groups of Special Olympics, integrated scholastic teams and adapted physical activities group perceived similar general self-worth in all groups. However, the integrated groups perceived lower athletic competence than the separated and adapted groups.

In summary, the result show that organized community sport promotes the development of a positive self-concept and (athletic) identity, regardless the form of disability. However, the picture is not that clear as that applies in particular to the separated setting. For the integrative and inclusive setting, in turn, there were also lower levels of perceived athletic identity and competence reported compared to the non-disabled participants.

Social support, acceptance and embeddedness.

Regarding social support, in general, Nicholson, Brown and Hoyer’s (2014) large population sample revealed that community sport activities have a significant but small effect on social support (i.e. perceived support from family, friends and significant others). However, the results indicate that involvement in organized sport does not necessarily produce higher levels of social support compared to other types of voluntary

associations. Anderson (2008) showed that female youths with physical disabilities engaged in an organized wheelchair sport group experienced higher and more varied levels of social support compared to an informal activity group. The participants of the organized group could specifically name people serving as role models for them and those people' reactions were more related to sport and goal achievement than to their disability. In a secondary analysis, Anderson (2009) concluded that with respect to social support socializing agents are mainly family members, peers, and significant adults, such as caregivers and coaches who serve as role models for the participants with disabilities. Goodwin et al. (2011) reported that youths with visual impairments participating in a separated camp received strong support under safe environment conditions by their coaches that on the other hand, however, limited the youths' opportunities to be independent. Darcy & Dowse (2013) identified a wide range of constraints for sport participation of people with disabilities that includes the "lack of paid carers or volunteers to assist in accessing and participating in activities; once at the sport, respondents reported a lack of assistants/supporters or coaches in chosen activities to provide appropriate support tailored to the needs" (p. 400). For inclusive settings, Hassan et al. (2012) pointed out that coaches engaged in inclusive Special Olympic sport programs provide strong social support in and beyond sport for participants with intellectual disabilities and serve as role models for them. Moreover, the coaches contribute to establishing networks of social support by selecting partners (e.g., schools or local community organizations). The same McConkey et al. (2013) pointed out that Special Olympics sports promote the building of alliances within local communities (e.g., schools, community and other sports organizations).

With respect to social acceptance, Ninot et al. (2000) observed that female adolescents with mental retardation participating in separated training groups of Special Olympics,

integrated scholastic teams and adapted physical activities group perceived similar social acceptance in all groups. Atherton (2007) showed that separated deaf sport club activity plays an important role with respect to socialization into the community of deaf people with similar life experiences and backgrounds, and that it therefore counters social isolation. Medland and Ellis-Hill (2008) reported that the participation of non-disabled athletes in integrative wheelchair sports has a positive impact on the recognition and status of wheelchair sports, which supports the development of the sport and changes society's perception of disability sports. Also Mc Conkey et al. (2013) showed that participation in inclusive Special Olympics Unified Sports program promotes a positive perception of intellectual disabled athletes and helps to change attitudes in society towards disability. In contrast, Spencer-Cavaliere & Peers (2011) reported for reverse integrative wheelchair sport that "although [disabled] participants identified with the role of athlete, they felt that others, outside the wheelchair basketball community, viewed them as disabled" indicating that there are "apparent differences between perceived self-identity and social identity outside of the sporting community" (p. 304).

Stressing social embeddedness, Goodwin and Staples (2008) reported that youths with different disabilities participating in a separated summer camp developed a strong sense of community and social belonging. The experienced "close social contact and shared life experiences provided a reprieve from the disability isolation they felt in their home communities giving social and cultural meaning to the segregated camp context" (p. 167). More deeply, Hanson, Nabavi and Yuen (2001) demonstrated that adult participants with spinal cord injuries participating in separated university's sport camp showed higher levels of community integration (e.g. physical independence, supporting a family, maintaining a job) than non-athletes. In accordance with that, McVeigh et al. (2009) showed that community integration is higher for organized sport-participants with spinal

cord injury than for non-sport equals, with respect to home integration (e.g. housework, children care, social arrangements), social integration (e.g. leisure activities, friendships) and productive activities (e.g. work situation, education, travelling). With regard to the latter, Blauwet et al. (2014) showed that participants with spinal cord injuries in organized sport activities are significantly more likely be employed (regardless of age or level of education) than participants in informal sport activities. Moreover, Urbanski, Bauerfeind and Pokaczajlo (2013) revealed that the type of organized club sport (team vs individual sport in separated settings) did not affect the level of community integration (including home, social, and productive integration scales); however, physical activity level in general is positively associated with community integration scales.

Summing up, the results are rather heterogeneous with people with disabilities receive respective social support to participate in organized sport that, in turn, however, may limits the development of their autonomies at the same time, which was observed in the separated setting. A similar ambivalent picture emerges to social acceptance that is generally promoted by participation in organized sport, however when participating in the integrative or inclusive setting the people's disability come to the fore and thereby reduces the perceived acceptance. In contrast, the results are consistent for social embeddedness with organized sport contributes to the community integration of people with disabilities, regardless the setting.

5. Discussion

The results draw a rather ambivalent picture of social participation of people with disabilities in organized community sport with both positive and negative outcomes. Overall, the positive outcomes predominate with the results illustrating that organized sport contributes to foster social contacts, interactions and friendships of people with disabilities, helps to develop their self-perception and identity formation and enhance

their social acceptance, support and embeddedness. Therefore, the results undoubtedly underscore the potential of organized sports to contribute to social participation of people with disabilities. However, there were also negative outcomes reported that makes the picture of social participation complex and appear to be contradictory sometimes, to which also Lee, Causgrove Dunn and Holt (2014) pointed. The negative aspects demonstrate that organized sport not per se exerts a positive influence on social participation, but only under certain conditions. Interestingly, the negative aspects were mostly reported in (reverse) integrative or inclusive settings when the social participation of people with disabilities was compared to non-disabled people. A part of the studies showed that although positive effects were measured for the disabled people in organized sport, but these were lower than for the non-disabled participants. Accordingly, people with disabilities often received lower social contacts, interactions and friendships as well as they perceived lower level of self-concept-related athletic identity and competence and social acceptance than people without disabilities. Sorenson and Kahrs (2006) gained more detail pointing to that only a few people with disabilities survive in integrative and inclusive mainstream sport, whereas “those with greater needs for support and resources will not be able to adopt the practices and values of able-bodied sport and therefore have fewer opportunities to participate” (p. 199). In this respect, Spencer-Cavaliere, Thai and Kingsley (2017) showed the benefits of separated settings for people with stronger support need, underscoring the importance of that setting.

Consequently, it is questionable if the integrative and inclusive setting, as the UN CRPD and associated approaches propose, is the most beneficial way for effective social participation. It appears that rather a mixed bag of participation settings and levels seems indicated taking into account peoples’ different conditions. Therefore, we advocate that all settings of participation —separated, (reverse) integrative and inclusive—have their justification as they all contribute to social participation, albeit to a different extend, and it

is to emphasize that all of them have their respective advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, as Misener and Darcy (2014) emphasize, “the goal is to provide people with disability choice to participate in sport in the way that they want to, with whom they want to participate, and in the way they wish to participate” (p.4). Given this, a more open-minded research is indicated about to carve out the respective chances and risks of each participation setting, i.e. the pros and cons of separated, integrative and inclusive organized sport activities. Hereby, it is to analyze in detail for whom and under which conditions which setting is appropriate, aims to add a scientific point of view to the socio-political intentions claiming for an inclusive-only approach in order to produce a more balanced picture of social participation.

Regarding the conditions, there are various factors to consider that influence social participation (Jaarsma et al., 2014; Shields et al., 2012), including individual level (e.g. participants’ motivation and motoric skills), social level (e.g. participants’ attitudes and social competences), organizational level (e.g. organizations’ resources), and environmental level (e.g., communities policy programs). Thus, further research should apply multi-level analysis investigating the relationship between relevant factors and social participation according to Koster et al. modified and extended framework, either in its entirety or in parts, in order to get a comprehensive understanding of social participation. In doing so, factors on the organizational level should be considered in particular, as Jeanes et al. (2017) stating that “at an organisational level, sport is currently not yet achieving this ambition [of effective participation]” (p. 3). Waring and Mason (2010) demonstrated that there is a link between increased organized sport opportunities and greater levels of social participation; however, there is a lack of such opportunities. Thus, Misener and Darcy (2014) blame organizational structures for barriers and failures to social participation stating that “people with disabilities participate less in all forms of social participation and sport is no different. Much of the lower levels

of participation are attributed to discriminatory management practices rather than a lack of desire to participate” (p.3). Also Hiu-Lun Tsai and Fung (2009) give support to this concluding that people with disabilities continue to face systematic discrimination within the community and negative social attitude due to “the ineffectiveness of organizations in providing well-managed social contact opportunities and sport participation information” (p. 165). That suggests that an enhancement of community sport structures and resources is highly indicated to strengthen the positive effects while minimizing and mitigating the negative effects. Against this, Suzuki (2017) argued towards a stronger need for meso-level action that means community sport organizations needs to engage in capacity building at an organizational level. Relying on capacity building makes sense because capacities are much easier to control compared to other barriers to social participation as, for instance, negative interpersonal and societal attitudes. Organizational capacities that are considered critical include finances, human resources, infrastructure and processes, relationship and network as well as planning and development (Breuer & Wicker, 2014; Misener & Darcy, 2014). Corraza and Dyer (2017) demonstrated that a supportive mainstream club structures was crucial to maximising positive impacts for participants. Similarly, Lee, Causgrove Dunn and Holt (2014) reported that high human resource capacity of mainstream clubs (e.g. supportive and educated coaches, understanding teammates) were key factors that people with disabilities realize social benefits and, to some degree, mitigate negative consequences. Importantly, capacity building include both disability and mainstream community sport organizations. With the UN CRPD social participation is no longer considered as only a process of adoption at the individual level with self-empowerment as promising strategy for effective participation (Block, Taliaferro & Moran, 2013). Rather, also processes of change at the systemic level are required, that means that organized community sport have to provide appropriate structures and resources that allow for effective social participation (Gieß-

Stüber et al., 2014). That includes that managing and governing organized community sport for people with disabilities is no longer in the sole responsibility of disability sports organizations, but there is a shift that also mainstream sports organizations are responsible for (Bouttet, 2016). And that implicates that community governing bodies have to provide respective sport policy programs for their resident sport organizations that are supportive to the organizations' capacity building (Jeanes et al., 2017; Spaaj et al., 2014).

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

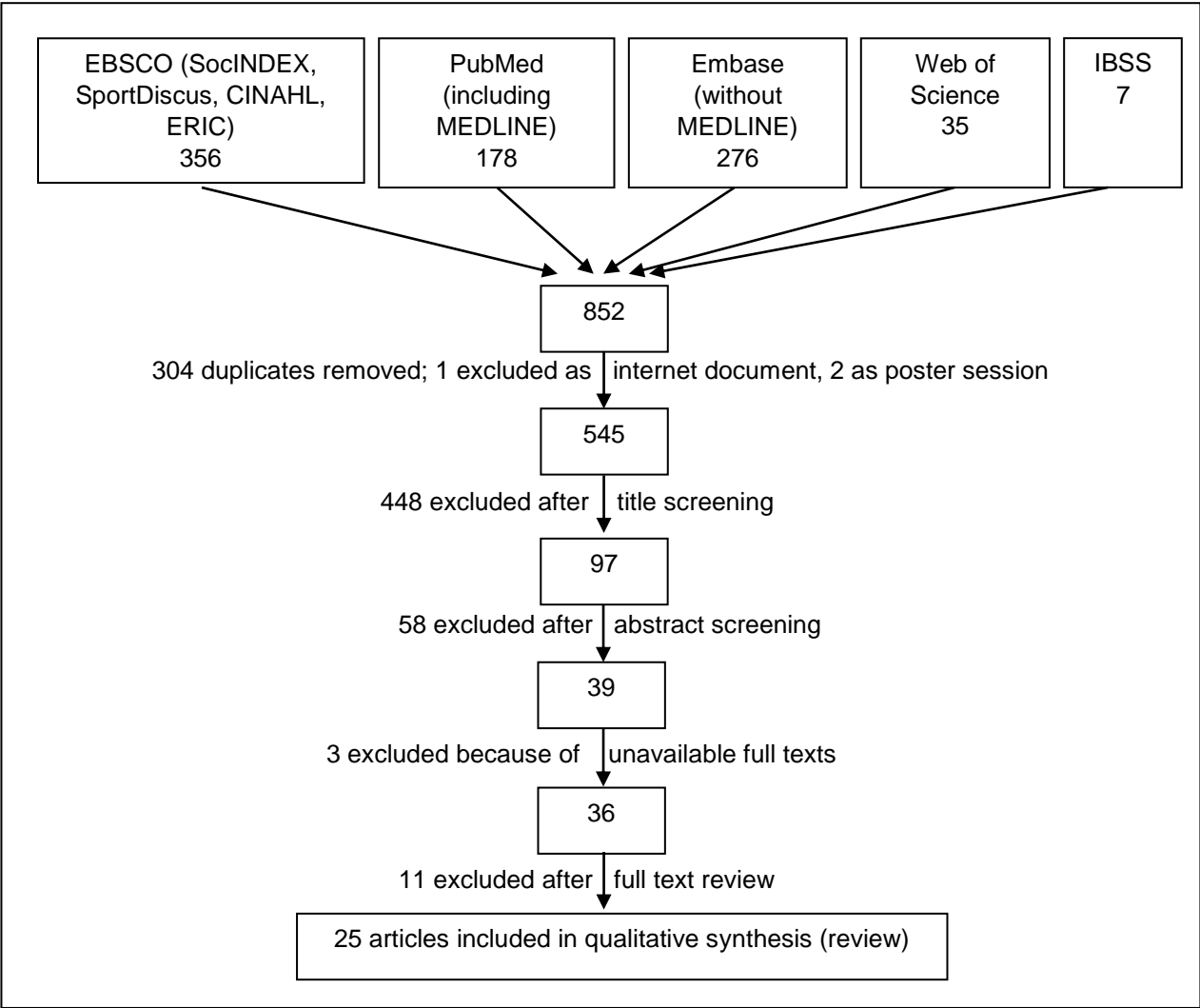


Figure 1. Flow chart of the different phases of the article selection for the systematic review

Table 1. Characteristics of the search strategy

Category	Keywords
Population	disab*(led/ility); handicap*(s/ed); impair*(ed/ment); challeng*(ed); special
Disability concepts	participat*; integrat*(ed/ion); inclus**(ed/ion); exclus**(ed/ion); challeng*(e/ing), barrier*(s), fail*(s/ure)
Concept of social participation	(social) contact*; interact*(ed/ion), isolat*(ed/ion), relation*(ship); friend*(ship); network*(s); percept*ion; identity; lonel*(y/iness); acceptance; support; reject*(ed/ion).
Sport context	sport(s); physical activity; para(sport); special
Organizational context	club; organiz(s)*ed; team; group; camp
Database	EBSCO (SocINDEX, SportDiscus, CINAHL, ERIC); PubMed (MEDLINE); Embase; Web of Science; IBSS

Table 2. Characteristics of included articles

Author(s)	Country	Participants	Disability*	Setting**	Organization	Sport activity	Theoretical-methodological approach	Results on social participation
Anderson et al. (2008)	USA	22 girls (10–18 years)	PD	SEP	local wheelchair sports	basketball, track & field, swimming	Qualitative study applying Model of Social Support (Pines & Aronson, 1988); Interviews (with participants)	Organized sport participants experienced higher and more varied level of social support (role models, similarity to others) than informal groups.
Anderson (2009)	USA	13 girls (10–18 years)	PD	SEP	local wheelchair sports	basketball, track & field, swimming	Qualitative study applying Model of Identity Development (Kleiber, 1999); semi-structured interviews (with participants)	Organized wheelchair sport contributes to children's' identity formation through social interaction
Atherton (2007)	UK	27 deaf clubs	HI	SEP	local deaf sport clubs	multiple sport	Qualitative study using document analysis of disability magazines	Disability club activity provides social contact and cohesion of the deaf community, with older club members serving as role models
Blauwet et al. (2013)	USA	149 adults (24–65 years)	SCI	n.s. (survey)	22% participate in organized sport	multiple sport	Quantitative study using standardized questionnaire (for participants)	Organized sports activity of people with spinal cord injury increases the likelihood of their employment rather than informal sport activity.
Carter et al. (2014)	UK	37 non-/disabled children, 10 parents	PD	INC	Local wheelchair club	not specified	Qualitative study using participant observation, focus groups and interviews (of children and parents)	Children with disabilities gained confidence to be part of a group and making new friendships by inclusive wheelchair sport
Corraza & Dyer (2017)	Italy, UK	38 adults (15 disabled, 23 abled) (17-65 years)	n.s.	INC	Local rugby club	Rugby	Qualitative case study applying Model of Social Inclusion (Simplican et al., 2015); semi-structured questionnaire (for participants)	Mainstream Rugby Club has positive social impact with enhanced social networks, an increase in social capital and personal development.
Crawford et al. (2015)	UK	101 adults (>18 years)	ID	SEP	Special Olympics, Mencap sport	multiple sports	Quantitative study, using Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ) (for participants)	Involvement in Special Olympics and Mencap sport programs is positively associated with self-esteem, quality of life, stress levels; however, not with an engagement in social networks
Darcy & Dowse (2013)	Australia	556 people	ID	n.s. (survey)	Members of various disability organizations	not specified	Quantitative study using online, interviewer-completed questionnaire (for participants)	Independent people with disabilities with low to moderate support needs show higher levels of participation and receive stronger social benefits (e.g., belonging, companionship and achievement)

Devine & O'Brien (2007)	USA	8 children (12–16 years), each 4 dis-/abled	ID	INC	local inclusive summer camp	swimming, canoe, rope course	Qualitative study applying Contact Theory (Allport, 1954); interviews (with participants)	Sport camp participants both experienced positive and negative aspects of <i>social contact</i> (e.g. nature, quality, conditions of contact)
Goodwin & Staples (2008)	Canada	9 youths (14–18 years)	BEH	SEP	Local summer sport camp	different sport	Qualitative study using interviews (with participants)	Youths with disabilities participating in a separated sport summer camp developed a strong sense of community and social belonging
Goodwin et al. (2011)	USA	13 youths (9–15 years)	VS	SEP	Local summer sport camp	different sport	Qualitative study using focus groups and interviews (with participants), and field notes	Camp participants gained feelings of belonging to a community through positive interactions and reciprocal relationships with their disabled peers
Hiu-Lun Tsai & Fung (2009)	Hong Kong	49 parents of children with intellectual disabilities	ID	INC	Local organizations providing sport programs	different sport	Qualitative study using interviews (with parents)	Most parents experienced rejection by staff and other participants when searching inclusive sport programs for their children. A lack of quality contact and understanding between people with and without disabilities is reported
Hanson et al. (2001)	USA	48 adults (18–53 years)	SCI	SEP	University sport camp	multiple wheelchair sport	Quantitative study using standardized questionnaire (for participants)	Athlete-camp participants showed higher level of <i>community integration</i> (e.g., mobility, occupation) than non-athletes
Hassan et al. (2012)	Serbia, Poland, Ukraine, Germany	25 youths (12–25 years)	ID	INC	Special Olympics sport program	football, basketball	Qualitative study using interviews (with participants, coaches, parents, community representatives)	Special Olympics program had positive impact for disabled athletes on their <i>social relationships</i> and received <i>social support</i>
Kristen et al. (2002) Kristen et al. (2003)	Sweden	20 children (9–15 years)	PD	SEP, INC	disability and regular community sport club	orienteering golf, archery	Qualitative study applying Holistic Taxonomy (Sherrill, 1998); interviews (with participants' parents)	Sport club participation provides social relationships (e.g. new friends) and being part of a <i>social group</i> (e.g. making new friends, feeling of togetherness and acceptance)
Ninot et al. (2000)	France	49 female youths (13–17 years)	MD	INT, SEP	Local sport competitions	basketball, swimming	Quantitative study using Self-Perception Questionnaire (Harter, 1985) (for participants)	Participants in separated, integrated and APA training groups perceived similar general self-worth and social acceptance in all groups.
Lyons et al. (2009)	USA	120 children (4–17 years)	MD	SEP	community baseball league	baseball	Quantitative study using standardized questionnaire (for participants and their parents)	Participation in communal baseball league has positive impact on family life and <i>enhances social interactions</i> (e.g. new friendship)

McConkey et al. (2013)	Germany Hungary Poland Serbia Ukraine	40 youths (per country) (12–15 years)	ID	INC	Special Olympics sport program	football, basketball	Qualitative study using interviews (with participants, coaches, parents, community leaders)	Participation in Special Olympics program promotes creating inclusive <i>relationships</i> , building <i>community alliances</i> and a positive perception of athletes with disabilities
McVeigh et al. (2009)	Canada	90 people (> 15 years)	SCI	n.s. (survey)	33% engaged in organized competitions	multiple sport	Quantitative study applying Community Integration Questionnaire (CIQ) (for participants)	Participants in organized sport showed higher <i>home and community integration</i> (e.g., housework, leisure activities, work situation) than non-sport participants
Medland & Ellis-Hill (2008)	UK, USA, Canada, Netherlands	20 people (21–55 years), 11 disabled, 9 able-bodied	DIFF	R-INT	Wheelchair sport league	basketball, cycling, tennis, racing	Quantitative study using standardized questionnaire (for participants)	Participation of non-disabled athletes in wheelchair sport promotes building <i>inclusive friendships</i> and changing society's perceptions of disabled people
Nicholson et al. (2014)	Australia	1833 adults (Ø 55 years)	DIFF	n.s. (survey)	67% sport organization involvement	multiple sport	Quantitative study using Multidimensional Scale for Social Support (MSPSS) (for participants)	Community-based sport activities have a positive effect on <i>social support</i> (i.e. perceived support from family, friends and significant others)
Piatt et al. (2017)	USA	47 adolescents (13–18 years)	PD	SEP	Community paralympic sport clubs	Multiple sport	Quantitative study using questionnaire applying Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (for participants)	The amount of time in sports participation contributes to athletic identity, but not demographic factors (e.g. age, gender).
Spencer-Cavaliere & Peers (2011)	Canada	9 female athletes (22–55 years)	PD	R-INT	Local basketball league	Wheelchair basketball	Qualitative study using semi-structured interviews applying Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (for participants)	Sport participation with non-disabled players contributed to a positive self-perception with enhanced athletic identities.
Urbanski et al. (2013)	Poland	30 adults (24–44 years)	SCI	SEP	local organized team and individual sport	multiple sport	Quantitative study applying Community Integration Questionnaire (CIQ) (for participants)	Type of organized sport (team, individual sport) did not affect level of community integration (home, social, productive)
Weiss et al. (2003)		97 people (9–43 years)	DD	SEP	Local organized team and individual sport	Different sport	Quantitative study using Perceived Competence Scales (Harter, 1992; Riggen; 1992) (interview with participants and parents' report)	Involvement in Special Olympics sport programs is positively related to participants' self-concept (e.g. self-worth, physical competence)

* *PD = physical disabilities; ID = intellectual disabilities; MD = mental disabilities / retardation; HI = hearing impairments; SCI = spinal cord injury; VI = HI = visual impairments; BEH = sensory and behavioral disabilities; DIFF = different disabilities; DD = developmental disabilities; n.s. = not specified*

** *SEP = separated; INC = inclusive; R-INT = reverse Integration; n.s. = not specified*